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Pinching the INGO Phenomenon: Putting Perspectives into Practice

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Abstract:

Voluntary agencies in general and International NGOs (INGOs) in particular have a history of involvement in a wide range of social welfare and development work which dates back to early twentieth century. In this respect the organizations originating from the developed countries have firmer foundations than their counterparts in most developing countries. The aim of the paper is to take a stab at the existing literature that relates to INGOs in developing nations and to offer important insights into their roles. In the process the paper also derives a four-role framework for the INGOs by combining some of the handpicked theories and putting them into practice with the help of case studies from India, representing the developing world which has, for decades, remained the focus for most of the INGOs' activities. India is of interest for this purpose because of its intractable problems of rural poverty and the apparent limitations of government programmes on poverty alleviation.

1 Introduction

“Theory cannot just be picked up: they have to be searched for, chiseled, shaped, pounded, recognized and reoriented. Creating coherence out of existing bits of theory is like getting an inside straight in poker. Theorizing is a creative act. Whether one is asserting that a theory of a kind exists (how remarkable!) or inventing one that claims to be new (thus running afoul of the encapsulated wisdom of the ages- if new not true; if true not new), one gets into trouble whichever way one goes”

(Wildavsky, 1989:29)

In quest for a convincing justification for the existence of the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and activities they are involved in; here is an attempt to review several hitherto existing theoretical perspectives that deal with voluntary action. This effort is expected to raise immensely important theoretical questions which will trespass into the territory of the political philosopher, historian, development researcher, organization theorist, management theorist and other disciplines as well. Studies on voluntary sector invariably become multi-disciplinary in order to seek answers to the great questions they invoke. The stance adopted in this paper is that theory is of immense importance for all practical purposes.

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Applying an appropriate theory may be the most practical asset available while deciding issues in organization and management, for, we never govern or manage in the absence of intellectual influences. For the methodological convenience, it is best to make our theories overt or else we are simply in the state what Henrik Ibsen describes in his play "*Ghosts*":

It is not just what we inherit from our mothers and fathers that haunt us. It is all kinds of old defunct theories, all sorts of old defunct beliefs and things like that. It is not that they actually live on in us, they are simply lodged there and we can not get rid of them. I have only to pick up a newspaper and I seem to see ghosts gliding between the lines.
(1881:Act2)

The substantial attention to context and theory in this context is intended to contribute to what Billis (1993:2) has called 'usable theory': ideas that make sense and can be utilized by those whose business it is to cope with the complexity and chaos. Such usable theory will be of assistance in designing the

have observed profound changes that also suggest new social movements. Empirical observations of emerging new characteristics of country-specific social movements have not generally led to a search for alternative social movement theories. Nor has the emerging transnational phenomenon led experts to examine critically and update the existing theories. One must, therefore, view INGOs in terms of globalization of development in general and changing relationship to state-centric politics in particular.

3 Theories on INGO Movement

3.1 Linear Theories of Social Movements

Linear theories state that social movements, whenever they emerge, are unique and must be analyzed as such. The uniqueness of a movement is related with the fact that the process of development is linear and produces unique social effects. So social movements are related with the social effects caused by development.

Claus Offe (1985:829) is of view that social movements are the means to help the political system

is not necessarily limited to social movements. It can easily be applied to NGOs. Nor his theory is limited to the national level given its level of abstraction. However, in practice, Habermas' theory remains limited by the fact that the political system he envisions in which social movements strive to restore the autonomy of the system and of the life-world is practically a national system. In Habermas' view it is particularly obvious that the primary function of a social movement is to strengthen the political system to restore its autonomy level. As explained in a lot of empirical works INGOs vary marginally but pursue this function.

3.2 Cyclical Theory of Alain Touraine

Touraine's theory (1985:751) intensively analyses the social movements in terms of political cycles. He views social movements as striving for political power at the national level. Social movements, if they want to be a part of the modernization process, must strive for political power at the nation-state level. To deserve the label, a social movement must be struggling to participate in national political process. He rules out pressure groups which only struggle for their interests, national movements which are prehistoric in the sense that they fight to establish the nation-state system and cultural movements whose main aim is to conceptualize a value change not as a political struggle. Had he been aware of the INGO phenomenon, he would certainly have ruled it out also. While defining social movements, Touraine assumes that all social forces must struggle to participate in power at the nation state level. The application of Touraine's theory to INGO phenomenon appears to be limited. Some national NGOs have been striving for political power at the national level to use the political system as a means to act upon society in general, and to solve specific problems in particular. INGOs do much more than that the geographical limitation of Touraine's theory and its conceptualization of social movement as a purely political form of activism and its reference to national politics alone ill suits his theory to account for INGOs (Finger, 1994:51).

3.3 Resources Mobilization Theory

This theory assumes that it is rational for citizens to participate in the political system which is simply the steering system of society and not necessarily the nation-state as referred to by Marxists. Society is basically an aggregate of rational individual actors and not necessarily, as Marxists view, a structured mass of potentially responsible and autonomous citizens who always remain defined relative to nation-state. For Resource Mobilization theorists, society is made up of multiple organizational structures. Social movements, then, are organizations like all others that involve rational individuals. The historical origin of this theory stems from the conceptualization of consumers' movements and public interest groups in the United States. According to this theory, social movements are organizations that help rational actors participate more effectively in the political system than in other kinds of organizations or in purely individual capacities. They mobilize various sources and compete with lobbies and political parties. This theory strongly calls for the participation in the national political system. So it is difficult to apply this theory successfully to the INGO phenomenon. Even if one could stretch resource mobilization theory to view INGOs as a form of resource mobilization, there is no international system to lobby rather national NGOs can be captured by this theorization. The fundamentally functionalist definition of INGOs neglects the political dimension of social movements theories (Finger, 1994:54).

All the social movements theories discussed so far have strong bias that makes it difficult to use them as models for theorizing NGOs in general and INGOs in particular. After 1970's some authors like Richard Falk (1995), David Korten (1990), Rajni Kothari (1989), Ashis Nandy (1989), Dhirubhai Sheth (1987), Judith Tendler (1982), Lisa Aubrey (1997), Peter Bowden (1990), etc have written about

global social movements. All of them share a similar analysis of the phenomenon as they all extrapolate national social movement theory to the phenomenon they see globally.

3.4 The Third System Theory

The Third System theory got the currency out of the observation that there is a generalized development crisis all over the world. The crisis

- Sovereignty resides with the people who are the real social actors of positive change,
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NGOs represent a network of “moral communities” that alone can generate the kind of social trust that is critical to organizational efficiency (Fukuyama, 1995:309)

3.6 Extension Ladder Theory of Public Policy and Welfare Administration

3.8.2 Concept of Civil Society

Vaclav Havel has been the most influential theorist

voluntary action in democratic societies. Enabling and enhancing voluntary action is perceived to be an important means of addressing the decline in the moral order in the liberal democratic societies. In addition, voluntary organizations are seen as key actors in 'civil society' not only helping to articulate a 'moral voice' but as more effective means to deliver public benefits and services compared to the governmental agents. Voluntary organizations are seen as partners for an 'enabling state'. They are effective expressions of the pluralistic nature of society and are an essential balance to the uniformity of state action. (O'Ferrall, 2000:5).

3.9 Explanatory Theories of Voluntary Action

The major theories developed in recent decades to explain the voluntary or non-profit sector, have been summarized recently by Helmunt Anheier (1998:41-52). There are five theories which seek to explain why NGOs/INGOs exist. They may be briefly described as follows:

3.9.1 Public Goods or Heterogeneity Theory

Weisbrod (1977, cited in Hansman, 1987: 28-29), who might be seen as the founding father of non-profit economics, suggests that NGOs produce 'public goods' which can not be provided through the market because they can not be withheld from individuals who refuse to pay for them. He offered the first general economic theory of the role of nonprofit enterprise suggesting that nonprofits serve as private producers of public goods (in economists' sense of the term). Governmental entities, Weisbrod argues, will tend to provide goods only at the level that satisfies the median voters. Consequently, there will be some residual unsatisfied demand for public goods among those individuals whose taste for such goods is greater than the median. Nonprofit organizations arise to meet this residual demand by providing public goods in amounts supplemental to those provided by the government.

A lighthouse is a good example of a public good which either must be provided by government or on a voluntary basis. The public sector can and does provide public goods using taxation as a funding mechanism. NGOs, even where the public sector provides public goods, may augment these to cater to diverse or heterogeneous demands or choices which the government would find difficult to justify in taxation and public expenditure terms (O'Ferrall, 2000:80). Weisbrod's theory captures an important phenomenon. Many INGOs provide services that have the character of public goods, at least for a limited segment of public. This is specifically true for those INGOs that collect private donations to deliver specialized services such as: hospitals, child care, day-care centres, schools, etc.

3.9.2 Trust or Contract Failure Theory

According to this theory, developed by Hansman (1987:29), NGOs exist because of instances of contract failure or need for trust. He argues that nonprofits of all types typically arise in situations in which, owing either to the circumstances under which a service is purchased or consumed or to the nature of the service itself, consumers feel unable to evaluate accurately the quantity or quality of the service a firm produces to them. In such circumstances, a for-profit firm has both the incentive and the opportunity to take advantage of the customers by providing less service to them than was promised and paid for. A nonprofit firm, on the other hand, offers consumers the advantage that, it is

The contract failure theory explains why particular kinds of goods are produced by voluntary sector rather than by the private sector. It argues that when consumers feel unable to evaluate accurately the adequacy or quality of the goods, they choose voluntary organizations as suppliers rather than profit making firms. Consumers distrust for-profit firms for such goods because they may provide inferior quality goods and pocket the additional earnings thus made. The opportunity to do so does not exist in case of the non-profit concerns as they are forbidden by law from garnering the extra profit. An enlightened consumer thus protects his/her interest by opting for the voluntary organizations.

This emphasizes the 'non-profit distribution' constraint and the fact that governance structures of NGOs suggest trustworthiness. Because this theory suggests, in essence, that non-profits arise where ordinary contractual mechanisms do not provide consumers with adequate means to regulate producers, it has been termed the “contract failure” theory of the role of nonprofit organization.

This theory might explain NGOs and INGOs operating hospitals, schools, day care or homes for elderly, providing relief, etc.(Ben-Ner, et al, 1993:27-58). In India most of the NGOs operate to meet the need of the vulnerable and those who cannot protect their interests. A modern welfare state is expected to provide them, but India has failed to do so. Patel (1998:48) cites three reasons for such failure. First, the state lacks resources. Therefore, voluntary organizations frequently supplement the supply of such goods. Second, often, negligent public servants fail to perform their duty, even when they have no material gains to derive from this. Of course, there are corrupt officials who can and do subvert enacted policies and reap unauthorized profits from them. In either case, those who are too weak to assert their rights are left out. Third, the weak and the vulnerable do not often know how to access merit goods. Some times they even have to be convinced of their benefits. These are the tasks that typically a voluntary organization is capable of and predisposed to performing. A vast majority of NGOs and INGOs operate/exist in India to address this shortcoming of the public system.

3.9.3 The Value-Expressive or Supply-side Theory

Eastlle James (1987: 398) has defined the Non-profit Organizations as “organizations that are legally prohibited from earning and distributing monetary residual.” Such organizations combine three

INGOs to carry out government purposes. Widespread reliance upon the NGOs is not an anomaly but exactly what one would expect. Salamon suggests that instead of demoting the NGOs to derivative role, it should be seen as 'the preferred mechanism' for providing collective goods, with government assuming the residual role. He has usefully identified four failures of NGOs which justifies government involvement.

- philanthropic insufficiency- which concerns the inability of the NGOs to generate sufficient income,
- philanthropic particularism- which describes the tendency of voluntary organizations to focus on particular sub-groups,
- philanthropic paternalism- where those in control of resources can choose whom they serve and
- philanthropic amateurism - which relates to professional service provisions.

Salamon states,

“Potentially, at least, the government is in a position to generate more reliable stream of resources to set priorities on the basis of a democratic political process instead of the wishes of the wealthy, to offset part of the paternalism of the charitable system by making access to care a right instead of a privilege, and to improve the quality of care by instituting quality-control standards. By the same token, NGOs can personalize the provisions of services, operate on a smaller scale than government bureaucracies, reduce the scale of public institutions needed, adjust care to the needs of clients rather than to the structure of government agencies and permit a degree of competition among service providers.” (Salamon, 1987:112)

Under these circumstances, neither the replacement of the voluntary sector by the government nor vice-versa makes as much sense as collaboration between the two. Viewed from this theoretical perspective the voluntary sector as the preferred mechanism for providing collective goods has certain inherent limitations. Hence extensive collaboration between government and the non-profit sector emerges not as a logically and theoretically sensible compromise.

3.9.5 Social Origin Theory

This theory developed by Salamon and Anheier (1998) argues that the size, and financing of the NGOs depends upon the type of welfare regime in a country in which they operate. They are seen as part of a complex set of historical relationships among social classes, party politics, government regulations and the influence of interest groups. Such a theory is particularly interested in the cultural and political embeddedness of NGOs in any particular society (Salamon, et.al. 1998:225). Banton (1968:357) has defined voluntary associations as groups organized for the pursuit of one interest or several interests in common. They are seen as an indicator of social evolution in the development from undifferentiated to differentiated societies. Hamer (1981:113) suggests that it is possible to see certain attributes in these historic forms of solidarity that may provide key to understanding certain pre-conditions for forming modern cooperatives and self-help associations.

Each of these five explanatory theories of voluntary action offer important insights into why NGOs and INGOs exist in mixed economy based democratic societies. It is helpful to identify what are often seen as 'unique competencies' or 'roles' of INGOs. Kramer (1987:245) has identified four such attributes or functions.

- **The vanguard role** whereby INGOs innovate, pioneer or demonstrate programmes or services.

- **The advocate role** whereby INGOs act as pressure groups to advance interests or views
- **The value-guardian role** which sees INGOs promoting citizen participation, developing leadership and protecting minorities
- **The role of provider of services** which neither government nor business are able to assume directly or fully

These attempts may describe what exists in the INGO sector and why the INGO sector exists.

4 Putting theories into Practice: Case Studies from India

In an attempt to understand the roles- devised from the discussed theories- of INGOs in India, we formulated the theoretical assumptions about the INGOs' roles in India and designed the tool for collecting the information about them. We have us

INGOs have innovative approaches to various means of social justice	Cost effectiveness of the projects/benefits Equitability in the distribution of benefits/services	Role of INGOs as the providers of services and Value-guardian Role
The activities of INGOs and the state are not mutually exclusive .Rather they are complementary to each other.	INGO-Local Government Relationship	Advocate roles of INGOs
INGOs have constituted a major part in the third sector to fill up the gap created by the public and the private sectors.	Administrative and technical Efficiency, Globalization of the local issues, Sustainability of the benefits and services, Accountability	Vanguard Role and .The role of being the provider of services
INGOs influence the media at local and international to globalize the local level issues/problems. The exposure of the rural/local problems to the international bodies helps in fetching more attention and funds	Networking , Media Campaign Globalizing and Internationalizing the local issues	Vanguard Role

4.2 Roles of the INGOs

In an attempt to understand the four-fold role of INGOs the study offered empirical evidences in support of the roles that the INGOs play in development sector. For the purpose, the *vanguard role* is operationalized in terms of the INGOs' efforts to globalize the local issues, *advocacy role* in terms of their role as pressure groups to influence policies of the government concerning the poor and the disadvantaged, *value guardian role* in terms of their role to build the capacities of the local communities/groups and empower them and lastly the *role of service providers* in terms of the wide range of services that they provide.

As vanguards, the INGOs attempt to identify and bring the problems to the notice of the outer world. These are, for all intents and purposes, done by raising the flags in national/international forums and conferences to invite concerns from donors and funding agencies. Oxfam conducts various researches and studies on Health, Education, Forest – Joint Forest Management (JFM), Community Forest Management (CFM), Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP); displacement, micro credit, drought mitigation, disaster and disaster preparedness. ActionAid India's approach to Rural Development (ARD), a document formulated after an international workshop in 1989, provided significant strategic inputs and helped ActionAid's understanding of poverty and its approach to reduce it In 1999, after a review of its past experiences at the global level, ActionAid evolved a document: 'Fighting Poverty Together' (FPT). The FPT provides a comprehensive framework for undertaking poverty eradication work through a rights-based mode of development work. Following these two exercises, the Asia Regional Office has drawn up the ActionAid Asia Strategic Plan reaffirming its commitment to internationalize the needs of the poorest and most marginalized people in promoting and securing their rights.

The other major role, advocacy, has been called the quintessential function of the voluntary sector. By their own measure, INGOs have been more successful in raising issues and educating the public than

in shaping the details of public policy or the operations of governmental agencies. The foremost step in policy advocacy is creating an issue and interjecting it into the political process.

to the preservation of organizational identity and enables an INGO to claim jurisdiction over a domain such as the underprivileged, poor children and women, people living with HIV/AIDS, disaster affected people, the aged, etc. Though an INGO may not have any necessary monopoly, its specialization and experience in certain fields of operation are major sources of its legitimacy and credibility and are expressed in the structure of both service provision and advocacy. LWS' initiatives in seven districts of Orissa: Bolangir, Kalahandi, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Nuapada, Puri and Sambalpur- providing improved varieties of seeds and low-cost appropriate equipments and encourages the farmers to take up new crops like oil seed, pulses, vegetables, etc in addition to their traditional crops. CONCERN has been providing training to local NGOs in Eastern Orissa and selected farmers on use of advanced technology in agriculture and nursery to increase their operational capacity and to ensure sustainability of the programme respectively. In 2001, CARE's Agriculture & Natural Resources programme drafted a sector strategy and initiated the Western Orissa Rural Livelihoods Project (WORLP)³. The project covers four districts of Orissa- Bargarh, Balangir, Kalahandi and Nuapara- spanning over 290 watersheds in a period of 10 years.

INGOs, working increasingly with and through local NGO partners, claimed an advantage over Government and multi-lateral operations in being above the process in4increas-1.15 TD01 Tc(7t0.00038(e)-1.2

the initiatives of the implementing agencies, evidence on the impact of INGOs' intervention is surprisingly limited. The reports which receive a wider circulation tend to concentrate on operational concerns related to programme goals or strategic orientations. Theoretically and methodologically there is great potential in the study of INGOs. A careful analysis can not only help to extend this relatively new area of people oriented research but can also contribute to developing new insights on development issues and models.

The theoretical perspectives discussed so far provide a potent room for exploration of the research agenda that might focus on some the unresolved issues.

- Classification and taxonomies of INGOs and their service programmes
- Assessing the impact and effectiveness of the INGOs' intervention
- Determination of size and scope of the INGOs in different thrust areas of intervention
- Development of valid and reliable indicators for service delivery goals such as access, accountability, adequacy, continuity, choice, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and equity.
- Comparative case studies in di

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